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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000299

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, OES/PCI
AMMAN FOR ESTH HUB (JWHITTLESEY)
INTERIOR FOR FOOSE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [TPHY](#) [MU](#) [ESTH](#)
SUBJECT: GOT WATER?

SUMMARY

1. Oman's Director General of Water Resources outlined the government's water management efforts in the wake of scarce rainfall, high demand, and increasing groundwater salinity. He noted that cross-border water usage was a concern, but that Oman stood ready to collaborate with the UAE on solutions. End Summary.

TIGHT SUPPLY

2. On February 21, Econoff and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Middle East Chief Michael Foose discussed Oman's water management efforts with Zahir Khalid al-Suleimani, Director General of Water Resources Affairs, Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment, and Water Resources. Al-Suleimani identified several challenges facing Oman, including scarce rainfall, growing consumption as a result of tourist and industrial activity, and increasing groundwater salinity, especially along Oman's fertile Batinah coastline, site of most of Oman's agricultural production.

3. Given these concerns, Oman has strictly regulated the construction of new wells over the past 10 years (only schools and government buildings are permitted to drill new ones) and prohibited deep well construction. Al-Suleimani mentioned Oman's use of USGS software to develop an aquifer management plan, and will soon reuse treated wastewater for landscape beautification in Salalah and Muscat. The government is relying more on water desalination plants, and is looking toward other options such as cloud seeding.

BORDER CONCERNS

4. Al-Suleimani acknowledged Foose's concern that the UAE had not put as much thought into managing water that flows into Al Ain from Oman. Noting Al Ain's lack of both a well inventory and water evaluation mechanism, al-Suleimani agreed that the area was ripe for collaboration. He commented that Oman would work with the UAE on strategies to manage the water supply, possibly to include constructing a recharge, rather than retaining, dam.

COLLABORATION POSSIBLE

5. Al-Suleimani requested assistance in creating a hydrology map to update flood risk zones, since the government did not budget for the project this year. Foose expressed USGS interest in assisting, but said that USGS would have to be reimbursed for project costs. Al-Suleimani was receptive to Foose's offer of collaboration with three USGS staff members stationed in Al-Ain, viewing this as an opportunity to work with both the U.S. and UAE on cross-border water management concerns.
BALTIMORE